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Category : February 1991
Published by Anonymous on Feb. 01, 1991

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Teaching Through Action

The Human Service Alliance is a volunteer community service organization whose roots and inspiration lie in the East, though it serves in a deeply Christian part of America. Members of the North Carolina group logged a remarkable 25,000 hours of service in 1989 and 90. Their existence and success is one of the ways in which Hindu teachings have manifested outside the more overtly Hindu structure of temples and ashrams. The core group of 26 members - all but 2 of whom have full-time jobs - average 46 hours per month of what Hinduism calls karma yoga, doing work without thought of reward. Selfless service is a spiritual path unto itself. HSA volunteers serve in five areas: 1) care for the dying: 2) assisting families after a birth; 3) mediation to settle disputes; 4) education and respite care for the handicapped and 5) a health and wellness program.

The present-day HSA is the result of a chance encounter between Derwyn Lackey and what he affectionately referred to as a "straggly group of people" whose project to help the terminally ill was floundering. "I recognized it didn't have any spiritual underpinning - later we called it a 'metafizzler' [rather than 'metaphysical']." Lackey accepted the members' request for spiritual guidance, drawing upon his own extensive background of study and exposure to Hinduism and specifically the works of Alice Bailey (which are closely attuned to Hindu/Buddhist thought and in the line of Blavatsky's Theosophy).

Lackey followed the suggestions of the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul, whose teachings were written down by Alice Bailey (a process now called "channeling"). In 1943 the Master Khul described "an esoteric school which would bind the membership by no pledges or oaths and which would - whilst assigning meditation, study and giving esoteric teachings - leave people to make their own adjustments to interpret the truth as best they could. The keynote of the school is service, based on love of humanity" [Discipleship in the New Age, 1944, by Alice A. Bailey].

Master Khul's teachings will appear familiar to any Hindu, incorporating Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms with a commentary by Bailey. The teachings focus on developing a consciousness of one's soul, rather than of the external personality.

Thomas White, an attorney, explained the spiritual purpose behind the HSA mediation program. "Our goal isn't to help the courts, but to establish that there are ways other than competitive adversarial ways to resolve disputes, so that some day people will say 'let's mediate' rather than 'let's go to court."'

Susan Beasley spoke movingly of a young man with AIDS who ended up in HSA's care after his family had abandoned him. A part-time volunteer took a special interest in this boy and contacted his family who, it turned out, had become quite distraught at the separation. A reunion was arranged as this one family faced up to and accepted the situation. Susan commented that this story showed how "people's consciousness changes. They begin to know each other at a totally different level. That's what our work is really about, to respond to souls."

But HSA is in a challenging situation, located as it is in a conservative part of the southern United States. Lackey said, "The majority of people we serve are very fundamentalist Christian and would be opposed to any thoughts of anything Eastern." Robert explained HSA's approach to their "guests" in the care for the dying program, "We respond to their own religious beliefs, reading from the Christian Bible, praying with them, whatever seems appropriate. We believe in reincarnation, but it is not imposed."

About one in every fifteen people who come in contact with HSA senses there is more to the group than meets the eye. These people are gradually introduced to the group's teachings, first through Lackey's book. Discoveries of the Inquiring Mind, and then through the teachings of Alice Bailey and various Hindu sources. Eventually they would be invited to the top floor of the HSA's center, a Siva temple (not open to outsiders) where simple but regular rituals honoring the deities are performed, along with meditations and chanting.

Volunteers related for HINDUISM TODAY examples of the spiritual rewards of their work. Joanne White told the story of Ryan, a severely retarded victim of cerebral palsy. Ryan's brother and sister, Shan and Megan, had received little of their

parent's attention, as Ryan cried 24 hours a day for his first year and 12 hours a day the second. HSA volunteers occasionally care for Ryan at the HSA center, allowing his family to finally give their undivided attention to the other children. Ryan's care led to another demonstration of HSA's healing touch. A volunteer, herself crippled and more or less abandoned by her family, was given care of Ryan - just to hold him in her lap. Joanne explained what happened next, "Ryan started to look around and look alert, which he never does. He pushed himself out from her, stood up on her lap and looked her right in the eye. 'I can't believe it,' the girl said, 'My mom and dad thought I'd never amount to anything.' A nearby volunteer said, 'It's magic.' But the girl pointed upwards and said, 'I know what it is. It's God. It's made my life all worthwhile."'

HSA's service illuminates a dark development of modern society - the demise of the extended family which leaves the handicapped, sick or dying in the care of strangers. Robert Beasley acknowledged the problem and observed, "There are a lot of reasons. They have no family or they've moved away. In many cases both adults have to work as neither can afford to quit. In some cases the spouse is too old to care for their partner." And it is through ancient eastern spirituality that HSA is successfully working with these modern problems.

HSA receives community support from foundations such as the United Way, the Knights of Columbus, local businesses and residents who just want to help. In addition to the core group of 26, approximately 100 more people regularly work as volunteers. All programs are free, and no volunteers are paid. Address: HSA. 3983 Old Greensborough Road, P.O. Box 1542, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 27102. Phone: 917/761-K745.

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